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DOCTOR WHO #4

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ACROSS THE UNIVERSE, STRANGE THINGS HAVE BEEN HAPPENING...
...ENTIRE CIVILIZATIONS HAVE BEEN VANISHING INEXPLICABLY...

...THE PLANETS JUST CARRY ON, SPINNING IN SPACE...
...USUALLY LEAVING JUST ONE SURVIVOR, ONE PERSON TO REMEMBER... ONE KEY TO THE PAST...

...THERE SEEMS TO BE NO PATTERN TO THIS, NO RHYME NOR REASON...
...BUT OF COURSE THERE IS. IT JUST NEEDS SOMEONE TO COME ALONG AND WORK IT ALL OUT.
WONDER WHO THAT MIGHT BE...

SO, RIGHT, DOCTOR. "PRESS THE BUTTON," YOU SAID.

POLICE BOX
"IT'LL BE FINE," YOU SAID. "WHAT CAN POSSIBLY GO WRONG, MARTHA?" YOU SAID.

SO, OF COURSE, I PRESSED THE BUTTON AND YOU STARTED LAUGHING.
POLICE BOX

SO BANK ON THIS, DOCTOR, WHEN I GET A HOLD OF YOU...

...I'M GONNA HUG YOU TO DEATH TO SAY THANK YOU FOR THIS!
WOO-HOOOOO!!
YOU... LOOK... BRILLIANT UP... THERE. WANNA COME... DOWN YET?

NAH— THIS IS... IS...
...AMAZING!
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

WONDER WHAT THAT IS? IT'S NOT THE FAST RETURN. IT'S NOT THE HELMIC REGULATOR. IT'S NOT THE HADS.

AH, WELL...

BEEP BEEP BE-

WONDER WHAT THAT DID?
DOCTOR!

OH, OF COURSE!

I'VE GOTCHA! I'VE GOTCHA! I'VE—

ACTUALLY, I'VE NOT GOTCHA...

YOU. ARE. CRAP. SOMETIMES.
OH, COME ON, YOU LOVE IT!

YEAH, ALL RIGHT, I DO. BUT ONE DAY, I'M GONNA FORGET THAT AND THUMP SOME SENSE INTO YOU.
YEAH, YEAH. WE'RE LANDING.
WORP WORPPP

EXCELLENT. WHERE? BETTER BE SOMEWHERE NICE THIS TIME. NO DEATH STALKING US, NO ANIMALS INVADING, NO BLOBBY MONSTERS RIPPING THE CORE OUT OF PLANETS, NO—

BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
OI!

UMM... ANY CHANCE YOU COULD...YOU KNOW...GET ME DOWN AGAIN?

NO! DOCTOR! DON'T YOU—

OW!
GRUNNP
OKAY. I ASKED FOR THAT.
BUT NOW I KNOW WHICH BUTTON DOES IT...

WOW. I MEAN, WOW. I'VE SEEN SOME MARVELOUS MECHANICAL PLANETS, BUT THIS IS... BEAUTIFUL.

IT'S VERY... SILVERY.

...LLLOOOOOOOO
FLESH!
AH, AH... UMMM... MARTHA?
DOCTOR?
RUN?
OH, YES!
C'MON!
OH...
FLESSSHHHH...
FLESSSHHHH...

SHOULD'VE STAYED IN THE TARDIS...

YOU THINK?

ELEVATOR!

LIFT!

"LIFT?" REALLY, LINGUISTIC SEMANTICS? RIGHT HERE AND NOW?

YEAH, RIGHT, SORRY— AUTOMATIC REACTION. AND HERE'S ANOTHER...

...HIT "UP." OR FLOOR 501. OR PENTHOUSE. OR SOMETHING!

WAS THAT SHOVE NECESSARY?

YES. OTHERWISE WE'D'VE BEEN STOOD OUT THERE ARGUING FOR HOURS. WOULDN'T WE.

PROBABLY, YEAH.

FLESSSHHHH...

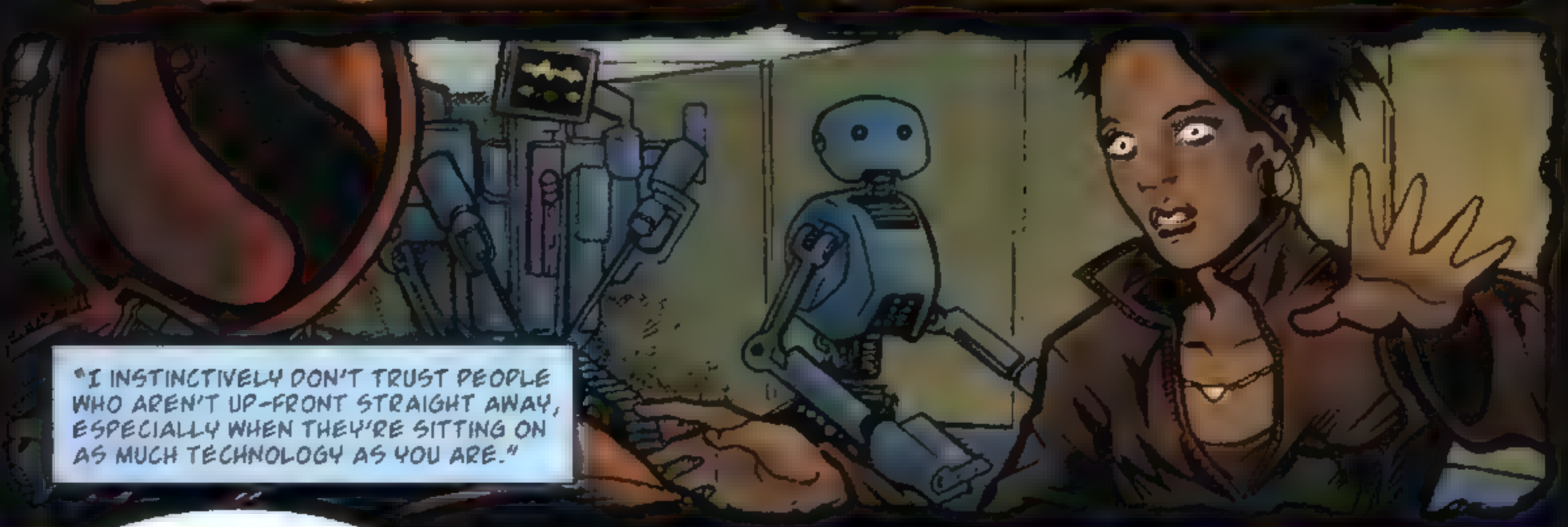
ROBOTS. WANTING OUR FLESH. NICE. DID ROSE GET THIS TREATMENT OR WAS IT BEACHES, SUNSHINE, AND HEALTH SPAS FOR HER?
I'M SORRY?
SORRY. THAT WAS WELL OUT OF ORDER.
S'ALRIGHT.
AND NO, IT WAS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME FOR HER.
YOU OKAY?
YEAH. COURSE I AM. SORRY, LOVE ALL THIS. JUST SOMETIMES...
YEAH. YEAH, I KNOW. REALLY, I DO.
AND I'M GLAD YOU'RE STILL HERE.
SO AM I. OBVIOUSLY. SORRY. HAD A MAD MOMENT.
WOULDN'T CHANGE A THING.

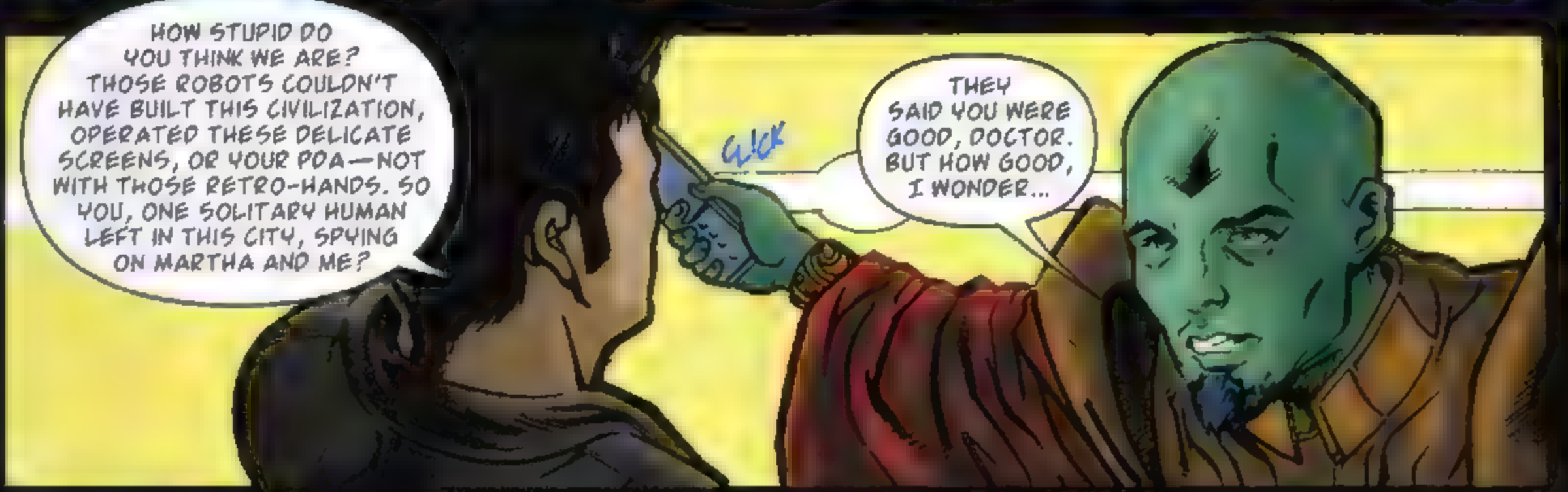
HELLO STRANGERS! ARE YOU SURVIVORS, TOO?
SURVIVORS?
OF THE GALACTIC HOLOCAUST? WORLDS RAVAGED, POPULATIONS DECIMATED, ENERGY LOST...? YOU... DON'T KNOW?
I'M THE DOCTOR; THIS IS MARTHA. AND NO, I'M TERRIBLY SORRY BUT WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.
WE WERE BEING CHASED BY ROBOTS...
.SOMEHOW THAT SOUNDED SCARIER IN MY HEAD
PROFESSOR THARLOT. I FEAR I AM THE ONLY SURVIVOR OF OMPHALOS.
COME ON, PROFESSOR, AS A PROFESSOR YOU MUST HAVE A LAB WITH TEST TUBES. AND PESTLES AND MORTARS, TESLA COILS AND THOSE FUNNY JUG-SHAPED THINGS WITH COLOURED STEAM COMING OUT OF THEM THAT YOU CAN SHOW ME. OH, AND HAVE YOU GOT A JACOB'S LADDER? I LOVE JACOB'S LADDERS.
OKAY, WHAT DID YOU WANT ME TO FIND, DOCTOR?
OH. OH, THAT'S ODD. NOT SURE THAT SHOULD BE THERE AT ALL. WELL SPOTTED, DOCTOR...

DOCTOR, MEET THE SURVIVORS OF TEN OTHER WORLDS WHICH HAVE SUFFERED THE SAME FATE AS THIS ONE. THE ENTIRE ORGANIC POPULATION— JUST VANISHED IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE. LEAVING JUST ONE KNOWN SURVIVOR.
UMMM... HELLO, EVERYONE. I'M SO SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS.
WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU HELPING THE PROFESSOR FIND OUR MISSING PEOPLE?
OH, IS THAT WHAT HE'S DOING? BIT TRICKY. NO LAB. NOT SO MUCH OF A BUNSEN BURNER, LET ALONE A SPARKLY JACOB'S LADDER.
BUT THEN I'M NOT AT ALL SURE YOU GUYS SHOULD TRUST THE PROFESSOR HERE AS MUCH AS YOU DO.
I AM AFFRONTED THAT YOU WOULD SAY SUCH A THING, DOCTOR.
OH, DON'T PLAY THE HARMLESS OLD MAN WITH ME, THARLOT. YOU LEFT YOUR COMMUNICATOR ON NEXT DOOR. AND I ASKED MARTHA...

"...IF SHE COULD WORK OUT WHY YOU HAD IMAGES OF MY TARDIS AND SHE AND I..."

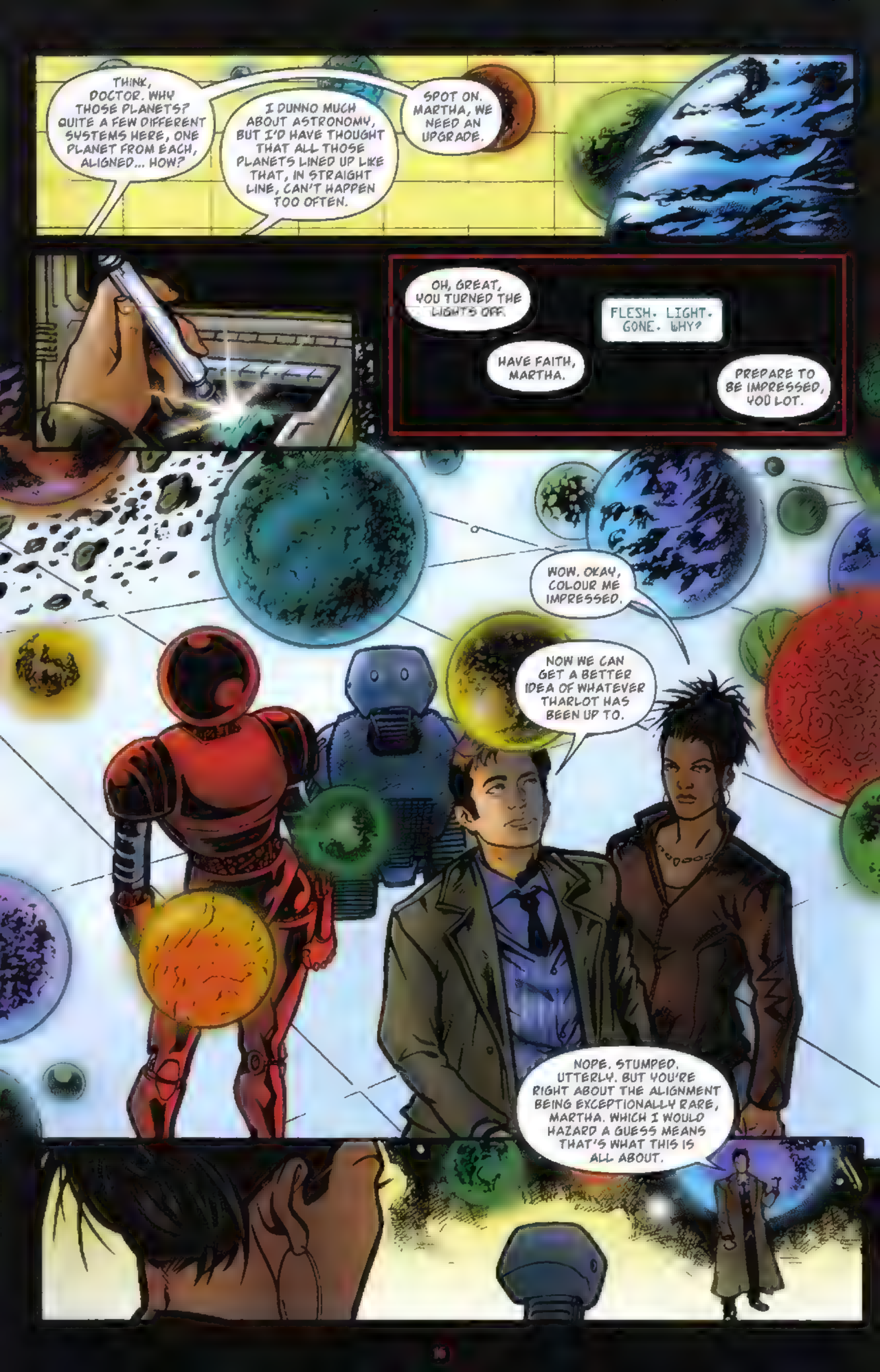
"...FROM A COUPLE OF WEEKS BACK. ON EARTH. YOU WERE RESEARCHING US, THARLOT. I WONDER WHY."


"I INSTINCTIVELY DON'T TRUST PEOPLE WHO AREN'T UP-FRONT STRAIGHT AWAY, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE SITTING ON AS MUCH TECHNOLOGY AS YOU ARE."


HOW STUPID DO YOU THINK WE ARE? THOSE ROBOTS COULDN'T HAVE BUILT THIS CIVILIZATION, OPERATED THESE DELICATE SCREENS, OR YOUR PDA—NOT WITH THOSE RETRO-HANDS. SO YOU, ONE SOLITARY HUMAN LEFT IN THIS CITY, SPYING ON MARTHA AND ME?
THEY SAID YOU WERE GOOD, DOCTOR. BUT HOW GOOD, I WONDER...

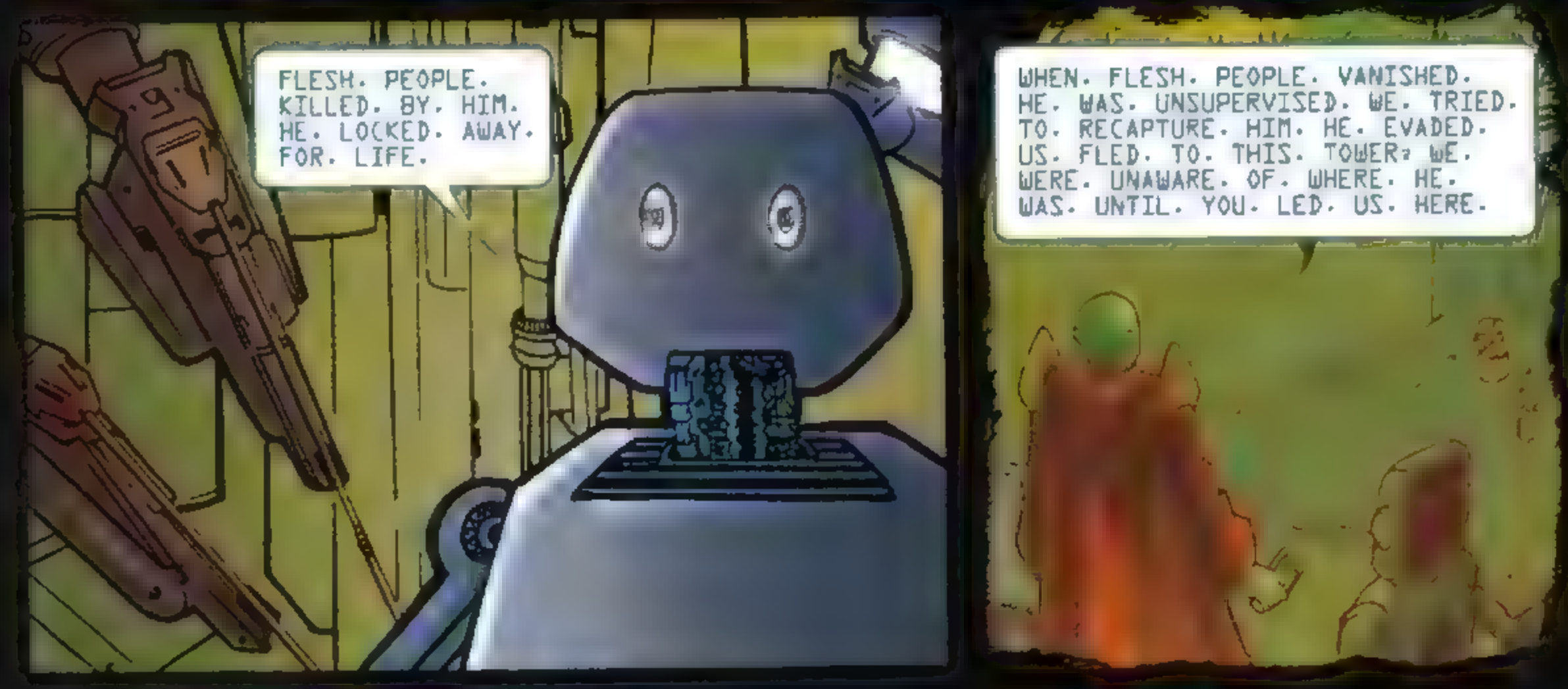
DOCTOOOORRRR!!
FLESSSHHHH...

WHOAAA!
FLESSSHHHH...
STOP! HALT! QUIT! DESIST!
AVAST ME HEARTIES?
DOCTOR, HANG ON. THEY DIDN'T HURT ME. I WAS TRYING TO GET YOUR ATTENTION.
SUCCEEDED WELL, I RECKON. SO, NOW WHAT?
YOU. ARE. FLESH. WE. NEED. FLESH.
WHY?
TO. LEAD. US. WHEN. FLESH. ONES. DEPARTED. WE. HAD. NO. LEADERS. LEAD. US.
PLEASE...
WHERE'S THE PROFESSOR GONE?
PROFESSOR? THARLOT. NOT. A. PROFESSOR. THARLOT. A. CRIMINAL.
QUELLE SURPRISE.
LET'S SEE IF THIS CAN SHED ANY LIGHT ON THINGS.


THINK, DOCTOR. WHY THOSE PLANETS? QUITE A FEW DIFFERENT SYSTEMS HERE, ONE PLANET FROM EACH, ALIGNED... HOW?
I DUNNO MUCH ABOUT ASTRONOMY, BUT I'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT ALL THOSE PLANETS LINED UP LIKE THAT, IN STRAIGHT LINE, CAN'T HAPPEN TOO OFTEN.
SPOT ON. MARTHA, WE NEED AN UPGRADE.
OH, GREAT, YOU TURNED THE LIGHTS OFF.
FLESH. LIGHT. GONE. WHY?
HAVE FAITH, MARTHA.
PREPARE TO BE IMPRESSED, YOU LOT.
WOW. OKAY, COLOUR ME IMPRESSED.
NOW WE CAN GET A BETTER IDEA OF WHATEVER THARLOT HAS BEEN UP TO.
NOPE. STUMPED. UTTERLY. BUT YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THE ALIGNMENT BEING EXCEPTIONALLY RARE, MARTHA. WHICH I WOULD HAZARD A GUESS MEANS THAT'S WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT.

HANG ON. YOUR PLANETARY POPULATION VANISHED, RIGHT, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE'S?
CORRECT.
TEN PLANETS ALIGNED, TEN HEADS ON SCREENS. AND THARLOT. WHICH MEANS 11 PLANETS. SO EITHER ONE MORE WORLD IS DUE TO GO THROUGH MASSIVE REDEPLOYMENT OF ITS PEOPLE, OR...
OR THARLOT CAN'T COUNT.
YEAH, I KINDA DISCOUNTED THAT THEORY, BUT WORTH MENTIONING ANYWAY. THANK YOU.
SO—ONE OF THOSE FACES I SAW WASN'T FROM A PLANETARY VICTIM, BUT WAS IN LEAGUE WITH THARLOT.
OR IS THE MASTERMIND, AND THARLOT'S THE FALLGUY.
ACCORDING TO OUR METAL CHUM THERE, THARLOT'S A CRIMINAL. I VEER TOWARDS MY THEORY. HE, WHOEVER HE IS, AND THARLOT ARE UP TO SOMETHING, TAKING AWAY ENTIRE POPULATIONS.
WELL, I WAS RIGHT, WASN'T I? BRIGHT BOY.
MR. WAIN, YOU KNOW YOU ARE ALWAYS RIGHT. WHAT NOW? IF HE GUESSES THE PLAN...
HE WON'T. NOT YET ANYWAY. YOU HAVE HIS SHIP?
"TAKEN CARE OF, MR. WAIN."

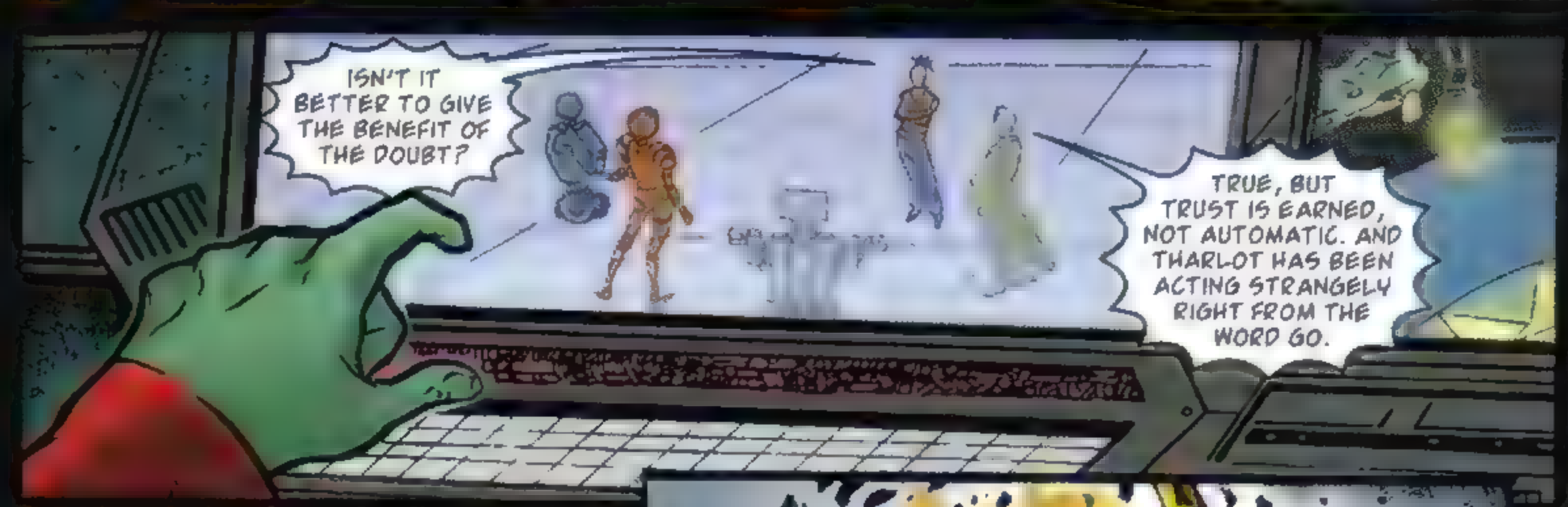
SO, TELL US ABOUT THARLOT.
HE. WAS IMPRISONED. TWELVE. CYCLES. AGO.
WHY?


FLESH. PEOPLE. KILLED. BY. HIM. HE. LOCKED. AWAY. FOR. LIFE.
WHEN. FLESH. PEOPLE. VANISHED. HE. WAS. UNSUPERVISED. WE. TRIED. TO. RECAPTURE. HIM. HE. EVADED. US. FLED. TO. THIS. TOWER. WE. WERE. UNAWARE. OF. WHERE. HE. WAS. UNTIL. YOU. LED. US. HERE.

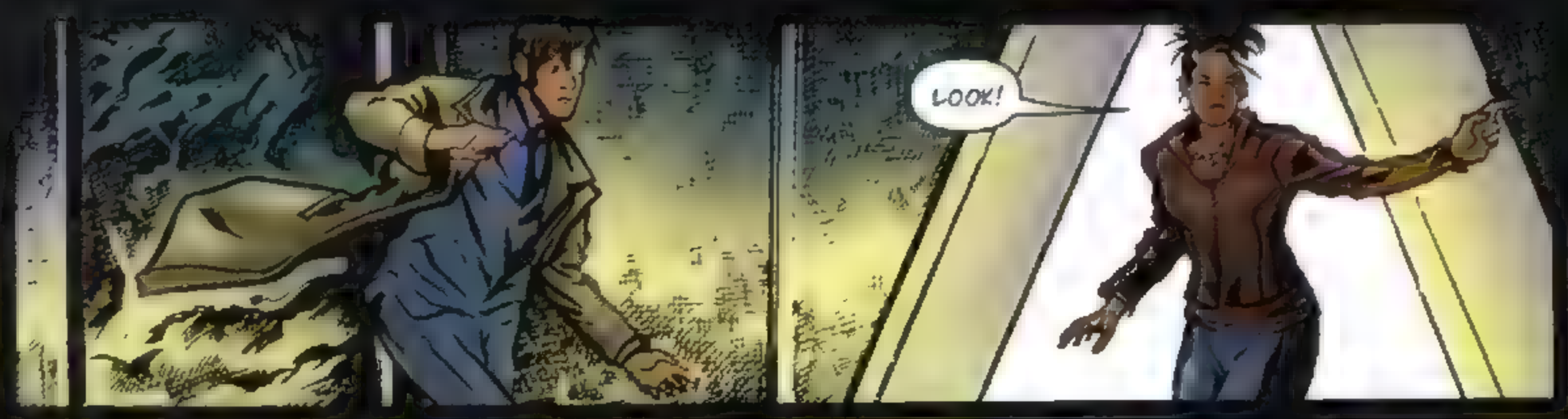
YOU THINK HE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE FLESH... THE PEOPLE VANISHING?
HE. IS. A. CRIMINAL.

CRUDE MACHINE LOGIC. HE WAS A CRIMINAL, THEREFORE EVERY CRIME MUST BE HIS IF NO ONE ELSE IS PRESENT.

"THAT'S NOT TO SAY THEY ARE WRONG."
"NOT TO SAY THEY'RE RIGHT, TOO, DOCTOR."


ISN'T IT BETTER TO GIVE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT?
TRUE, BUT TRUST IS EARNED, NOT AUTOMATIC. AND THARLOT HAS BEEN ACTING STRANGELY RIGHT FROM THE WORD GO.

KLIK
C'MON!
BOOM


LOOK!

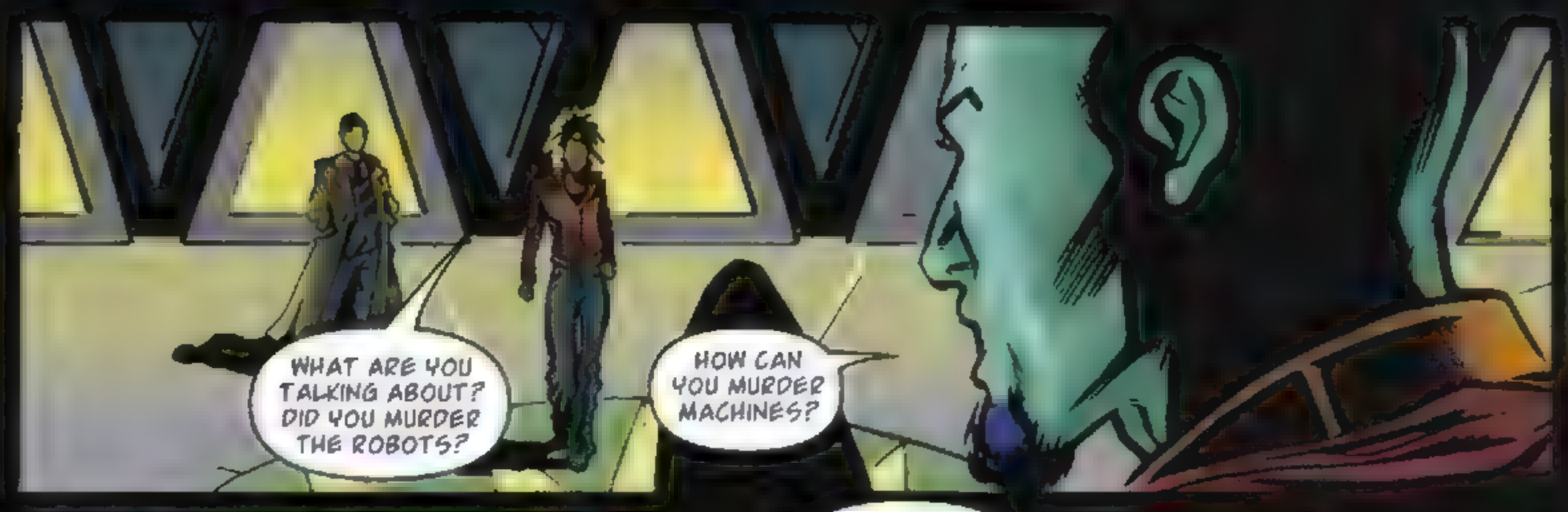
THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE...
OH COME ON, PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS NICKING YOUR TARDIS...

HOW BIG IS THIS ROOM, MARTHA?
IT'S MASSIVE... OH. OH. OKAY, YEAH, THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. WE SAW THIS BUILDING, IT'S A TALL, THIN TOWER. HOW ON EARTH DOES THIS ROOM FIT INSIDE IT, UP HERE AT THE TOP?

DO YOU LIKE IT, DOCTOR? I SPENT YEARS PREPARING FOR THIS MOMENT, YEARS PLANNING EVERYTHING. HERE!

YOU'LL NEED THIS. IT'LL LEAD YOU TO THE LEASH.

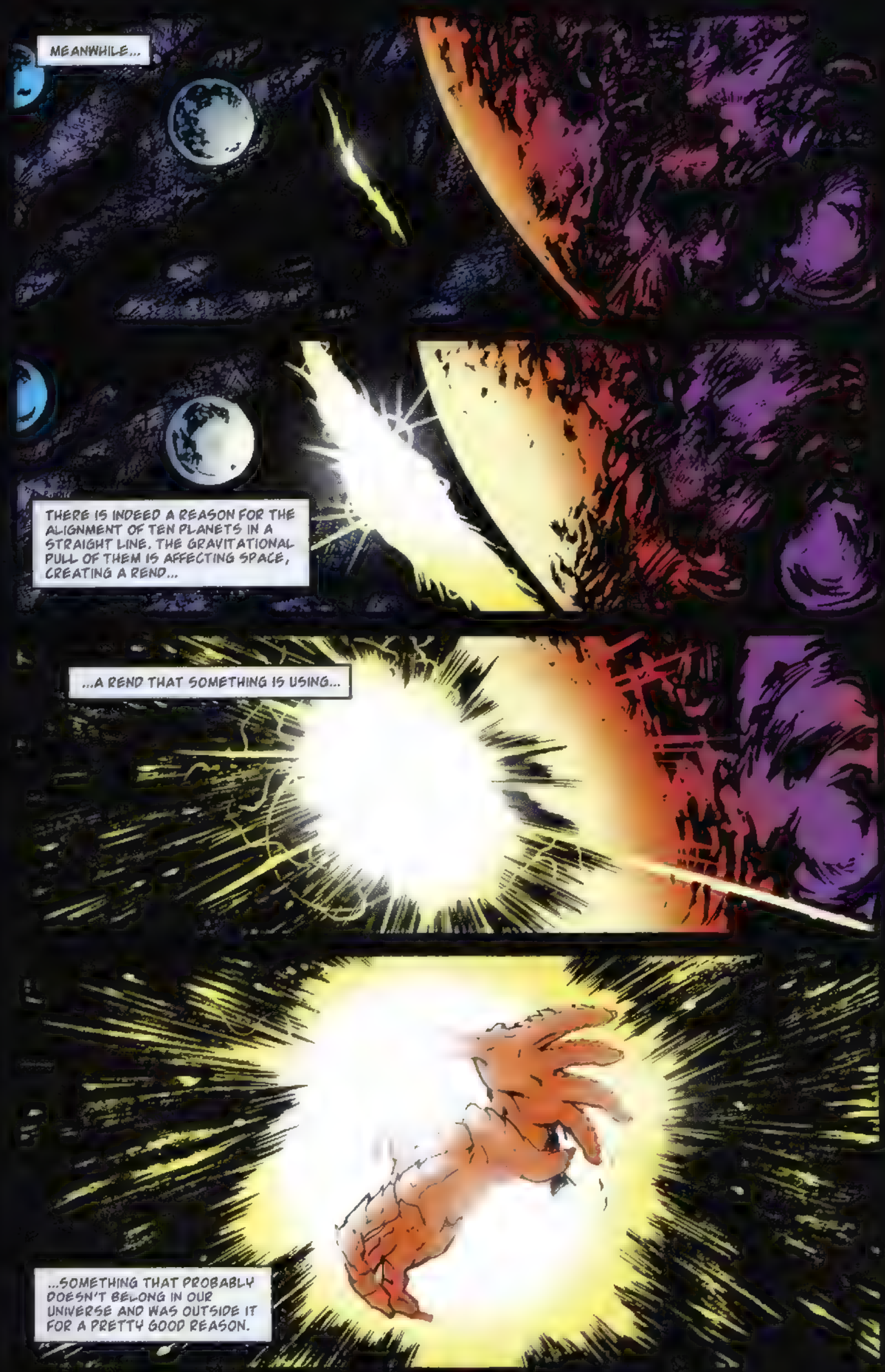
LEASH?

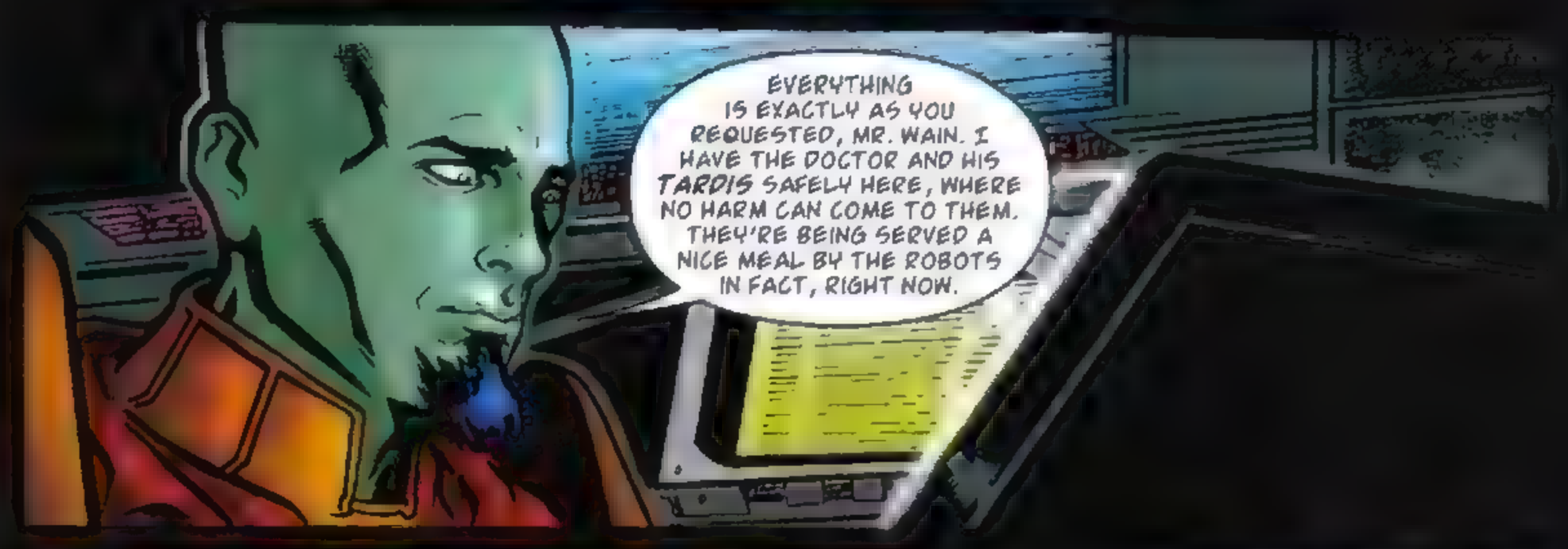

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? DID YOU MURDER THE ROBOTS?
HOW CAN YOU MURDER MACHINES?

YOU'RE UNDERTAKING A JOB FOR ME, MARTHA JONES.
MARTHA! GET BACK FROM THAT THING ON THE FLOOR!

TOO LATE, DOCTOR. YOU'RE ABOUT TO DISCOVER MY SPACE-TIME PORTAL. I HAVE SPENT A LIFETIME BUILDING THIS PLACE, CREATING A TINY POCKET DIMENSION TO KEEP IT ALL SAFELY IN.

FIND THE LEASH, DOCTOR, AND MY DEVICE WILL BRING YOU BACK HERE. TO YOUR SHIP.
"FAIL ME, AND YOU'LL NEVER SEE YOUR TARDIS AGAIN..."


MEANWHILE...
THERE IS INDEED A REASON FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF TEN PLANETS IN A STRAIGHT LINE. THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF THEM IS AFFECTING SPACE, CREATING A REND...
...A REND THAT SOMETHING IS USING...
...SOMETHING THAT PROBABLY DOESN'T BELONG IN OUR UNIVERSE AND WAS OUTSIDE IT FOR A PRETTY GOOD REASON.


EVERYTHING IS EXACTLY AS YOU REQUESTED, MR. WAIN. I HAVE THE DOCTOR AND HIS TARDIS SAFELY HERE, WHERE NO HARM CAN COME TO THEM. THEY'RE BEING SERVED A NICE MEAL BY THE ROBOTS IN FACT, RIGHT NOW.

WE HAVE THE DOCTOR. I SHALL SEND MY MEN TO RETRIEVE HIM FROM OMPHALOS AND TAKE HIM TO THE POINT OF EMERGENCE. THERE, WE CAN... USE HIS SKILLS.

EXCELLENT. THANK YOU, WAIN.
YOU ARE SURE THE DOCTOR WILL BE SAFE ON OMPHALOS?
HE IS SO VERY IMPORTANT TO WHAT COMES NEXT.

"DON'T WORRY, THE DOCTOR IS IN PERFECTLY SAFE HANDS. THARLOT WOULDN'T BETRAY US."
TO BE CONTINUED.

NEXT MONTH IN:
ISSUE #5

IDWORDS
News from the nerve center of IDW Publishing

JOHN BYRNE'S LATEST *ASSIGNMENT* ARRIVES IN MAY!

The esteemed creator launches his first-ever Star Trek miniseries

Among the few living and working comic book creators who really do need no introduction, **John Byrne** is an individual near the top of that very short list. And yet, despite decades of phenomenal success that has seen him help revive characters from the X-Men to Superman, as well as debut runs on his own wildly successful creations like ***John Byrne's Next Men***, the lifelong ***Star Trek*** fan has never actually put pen to a *Star Trek* comic book until coming to IDW.

After getting a warm-up with the *Alien Spotlight: Romulans* book released in February, Byrne has opened up the afterburners for his first-ever full-fledged *Star Trek* series, ***Star Trek: Assignment Earth***. Part of IDW's Star Trek: Second Stage line of titles that feature major storytelling talent for its second year of publishing Starfleet stories, the book takes the "back-door" pilot seen as the season two finale of The Original Series and, 40 years later, gives life to the spin-off that never came to pass. Byrne took a break from his drawing table to talk to IDW about his new Star Trek work, reviving his older *Next Men* comics, and the joys of watching young Teri Garr.

APRIL RELEASES FROM IDW PUBLISHING

Angel: After the Fall #6
Badger Saves the World #5
Doctor Who #4
Doctor Who Classics #5
Everybody's Dead #2
Fallen Angel #26
FX #2
Gene Simmons Zipper #6
Ghost Whisperer: The Haunted #2
Locke & Key #3
The Executioner: The Devil's Tools #1
The Mummy Movie Prequel: The Rise and Fall of Xango's Ax #1
Rogue Angel: Teller of Tall Tales #3
Silent Hill: Sinner's Reward #3
Speed Racer: Chronicles of the Racer #4
Star Trek: The Next Generation: Intelligence Gathering #4
Star Trek: New Frontier #2
Star Trek: Year Four: The Enterprise Experiment #1
The Transformers: Best of the UK: Dinobots #6
The Transformers: Best of the UK: Space Pirates #2
Transformers Movie Sequel: The Reign of Starscream #1

Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy, Vol. 4
CVO: African Blood TPB
Gene Simmons Dominatrix TPB
Gene Simmons House of Horrors TPB
Speed Racer: Chronicles of the Racer TPB
Speed Racer/Racer X: The Origins Collection TPB

The Executioner: The Devil's Tools #1

Star Trek: Year Four: The Enterprise Experiment #1

Angel: After the Fall #6

The Mummy Movie Prequel: The Rise and Fall of Xango's Ax #1

Transformers Movie Sequel: The Reign of Starscream #1

IDW: Decades into the comics biz, and this is the first time you've sharpened your pencil for a full-fledged Star Trek series. How did that come about?

JB: The most prosaic way possible—I was asked! IDW Editor-in-Chief Chris Ryall had contacted me about the *Next Men* reprints, and threw out the idea of my doing some *Star Trek* stuff. I protested that my likenesses were not up to the task, but he is a persistent little bugger (name that quote!) and suggested maybe one of the Alien Spotlight books, where likenesses would not be an issue. Thus, *Romulans.* Then Chris asked if there was anything else I'd be interested in doing in that vein, and I asked about Gary Seven.

IDW: That's a pretty obscure character. What about him caught your attention? It was that awesome ballpoint pen, right?

JB: That, and Teri Garr! No, seriously, when I first saw the episode, at the end of the second season of The Original Series, I was still naive enough not to recognize it as a pilot. I saw it in much the same light as Harry Mudd—a character/situation being introduced that would turn up again in future episodes. When no such episodes were forthcoming, I thought about doing some of my own, though I didn't really consider ever actually having a place to put 'em!

IDW: Still, it's an incredibly original idea to do a comics version of the Gary Seven TV spin-off that never came to pass. Skipping a year forward with each issue will also be unconventional. In fact, it's probably the most unusual Star Trek *title ever published. Was that what you set out to do—"go where no miniseries has gone before"?*

JB: The year skips are a minor element, really. I've said elsewhere that unless the reader is really hip to the history of the period, they will most likely not get any sense of how much time is passing. Mostly I'm doing it because I want to start close to the original episode, which was 1968, but one of the stories I came up with involves Nixon's visit to China, which was 1972. But, really, to a casual reader, I'll bet if I said there was no more than a month between issues there would be nothing—aside from Roberta's hair, which will be different in every issue—to clue them in to anything otherwise.

IDW: With the stories set in the 1960s and '70s, how will you keep it connected to Trek, so that fans will see that it's different, yet still familiar?

JB: Well, there's a big honkin' *Star Trek* in the logo, for a start! Also, the second issue "crosses over" with an actual episode of The Original Series. I'd thought about doing this in the third issue, but the Trekkie inside me couldn't wait.

IDW: Aha, a Trekkie, not a Trekker. That's a sure sign of an old-school fan. If you've been such a fan since you were a kid, why did it take you so long to decide to do a series?

JB: Mostly, the likenesses issue. Much as I love *Star Trek,* I did not want to face the nightmare of licensed projects again. Having actors sign off on their images is always a pain. Their mirrors don't work the same way that cameras do!

IDW: There are very few people who have drawn both Star Trek *and the* X-Men *without having actually drawn "*Star Trek/X-Men*." There's you, Dave Cockrum, and I think Jim Lee did a* Voyager *cover once. That leaves you uniquely qualified to talk about* Trek *crossovers. If you could do a* Star Trek *crossover however you'd like, with any other fictional source, what would it be?*

JB: This is nothing major, but since I started working on *Assignment Earth,* I have found myself thinking a crossover with Roddenberry's other, similarly themed busted pilot, *The Questor Tapes,* would be fun.

IDW: Let's talk about a few of your other projects. Your series FX *with Wayne Osborne (also published by IDW) is gloriously retro, a superhero book that feels like it's straight out of the late 1970s or early '80s. Is that one of your favorite eras in comics?*

JB: No, my favorite is a bit earlier! But it's definitely Wayne's. I think it's a disservice to call the book "retro," though. It's definitely not grim and gritty—or "gloomy," as Dave Gibbons has pointed out the "grim and gritty" books really are. It's old-time superheroics, much in the vein of Stan and Jack's *Fantastic Four,* or Stan and Steve's *Spider-Man,* but it has its own set of modern sensibilities, too. There'll be no doubt reading it that this is a book set in the 21st century, intended for a 21st century audience.

IDW: IDW is also going to reprint your entire Next Men *run, along with* 2112, Babe *and* Danger, Unlimited. *Is there the possibility of a new* Next Men *series on the horizon? This is just a courtesy question, mind you, since I have already decided for you that your answer will be "yes."*

JB: If it looks like *Next Men* can be done as something other than a vanity project, I will certainly do it. The series has a definite ending—I even know the last line!—and I would very much like to shake those 20 or so issues out of my head some day!

IDW: Any possibility of another Star Trek *miniseries after* Assignment Earth? *A more traditional Kirk-era story, or something set in* The Next Generation?

JB: Doing *Romulans* and *Assignment Earth* has opened a door in my head that has been closed—or at least pushed to close—for a long time. All kinds of stuff seems to be trying to spill out. If *Assignment Earth* goes over well, I'd like to do more of that, plus there is another potential "spin-off" that Chris and I touched on briefly. Aside from a few *Voyager* episodes, though, there really isn't any *Star Trek* for me after The Original Series, and unless I'm allowed to go check out some of the other ships of the fleet, visiting that period brings up the old spectre of likenesses again! IDW

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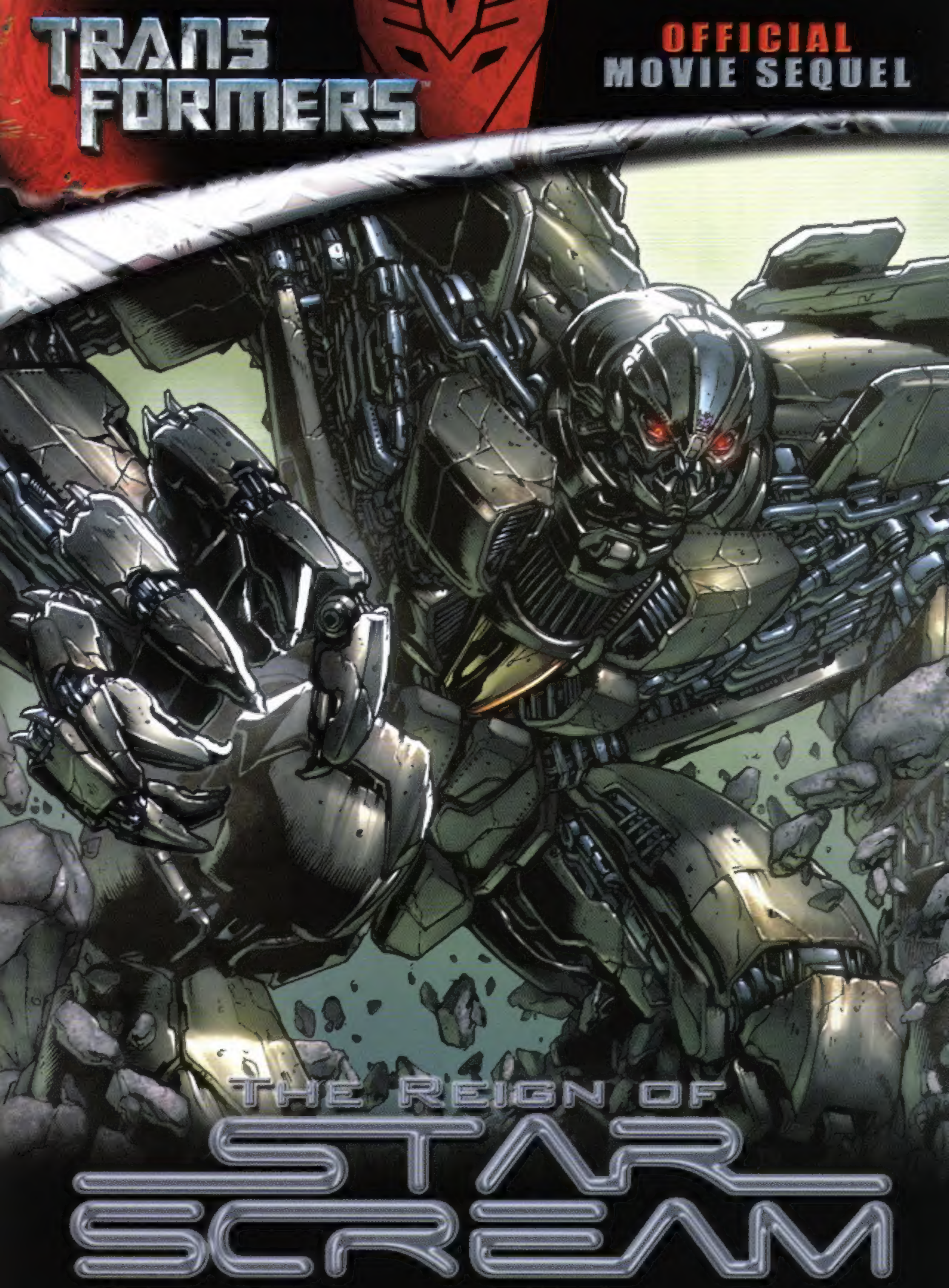

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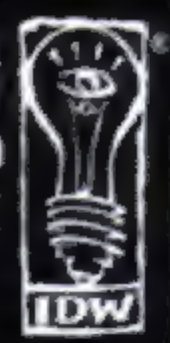

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